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Creating compelling change stories

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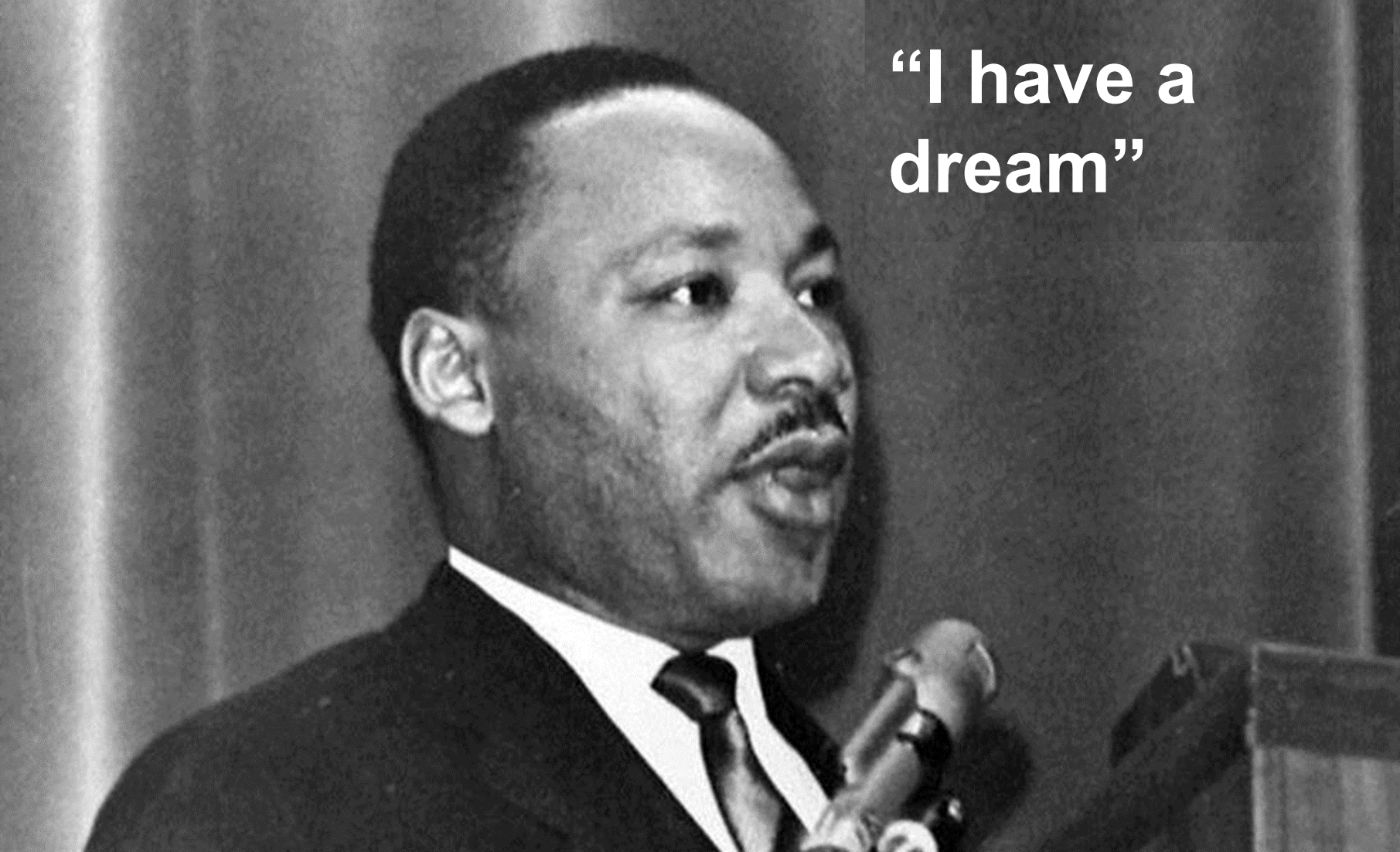
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A compelling change story does not start like this ...



**“I have a
plan with 10
initiatives”**

... it shares a vision



“I have a dream”

An engaging change story will make a tangible difference to a transformation's success

1 A workforce ready to achieve business objectives, with understanding and conviction about what is changing and why

Transformations where senior leaders communicate openly and honestly about progress are...

8x

more likely to succeed

2 An organization that sees an aligned and united leadership team sharing clear and consistent messaging

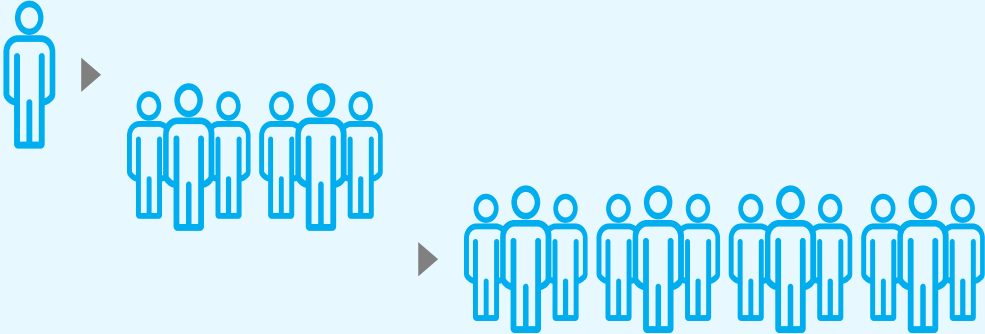
Transformations where senior leaders used a consistent change story to align the organization around its goals are...

3.8x

more likely to succeed

People who feel they have co-created a solution feel 5 times more ownership than those who are “told” the solution

Empower employees to write their own story within the context of the overall story



A good change story engages hearts and minds

A change story offers



Context, rationale, and explanation



A clear and compelling aspiration



A personal message

When it works



It helps people **make sense of** changes



Leaders role model their commitment and **demonstrate humanity and vulnerability**



It engages employees **at a personal level, both rationally and logically**

Example – A classic change story

We have many strengths but we are lagging behind others in the industry

We need to focus on **delivering value** and turning this ship around

We will make this a **great place to work**. We want to Be the Best

We are launching a transformation in 3 waves. Change may be hard as we reshape our company so we must all **focus on our customers**

This is your opportunity to **step up and get involved**. Be the change you want to see in the world!

I will support you. My door is open. Thank you for helping make us a leading provider of multipurpose value-generating industry solutions. I am excited about the path forward

How would you tailor the central change idea for your group?

Answer these questions

- What do we want to achieve?
- What are we doing right? What are the most important strengths we have that we can build on?
- What do we need to change? What are the most important issues we need to face and deal with?
- What would it look like if we applied our strengths and resolved those issues?
- How will we get there?

Synthesize and share your change idea with a colleague in 2 minutes or less

My change idea is

Ask your colleague to fill in the box below

For example: We have always done _____. This no longer works because of _____. Now we need to _____. If we do this, we will become _____.

People will only change if they believe the change is meaningful to them, so we need to know what matters to them



The rational

- Will I lose my job?
- How will I fit into the new organization?
- Will I have to retrain?
- Will I have to move?

The emotional

- Am I bad at my job?
- How will I explain this to my family?
- Will the new company be a place where I will want to work?
- Am I valued as a person?

Get into pairs. Step into the shoes of the most resistant type of person you may need to convince. What are their values, experiences, goals? Imagine them saying, “The real reason I don’t want to change is ...” Take turns telling each other what the change idea is and why this person would be resistant

Reflect on the following questions

What did you learn about the person who does not want to change?

Would you change your approach when speaking to that person?

Would you alter the change vision?

If we want people to listen, we need to capture their attention – and since different people pay attention to different things, we need to think through all 5 sources of meaning



01

Mission, society

Improving society

Building the community

Stewarding resources



02

Company, shareholder

Share price targets

Industry leadership, stewardship

Beating the competition



03

Customer

Superior service

Better quality products

Making it easy for the clients



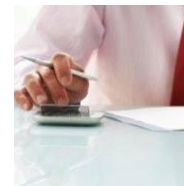
04

Team experience

High-performing teams

Sense of belonging

Caring meritocracy



05

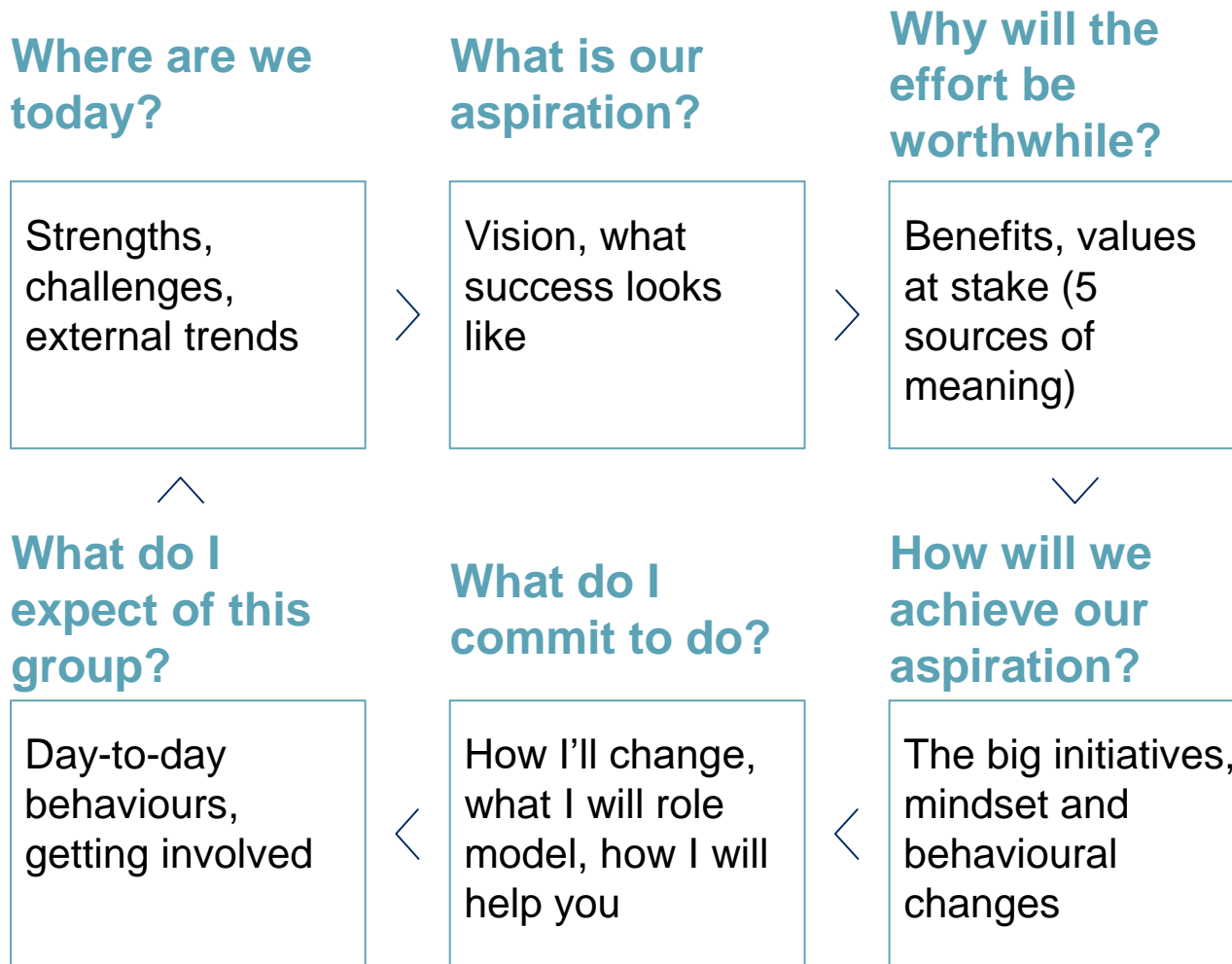
Me personally

Personal development

Paycheck/ bonus

Empowerment and advancement

The next step is to think through the building blocks of a change story



Tips for creating a compelling narrative – 1/2

Humans are not ideally set up to understand logic; they are ideally set up to understand stories.”
Roger C. Schank, artificial intelligence theorist and cognitive psychologist

Tip	What it means in practice
Convey your own personal energy, excitement, and conviction	Use phrases such as, “I feel...,” “I’m doing this because...,” “I want to go for this...,” or “I know we can do this”
Use anecdotes that make it real to people	Share examples that will resonate with your audience and that illustrate the change you want to see/situation you want to change
Be clear on your rationale for change	Draw on both the burning platform (we have to change) and the shining beacon (we are changing because of what we can achieve); link to relevant external trends or internal events
Be honest	When you don’t know something, tell people that you don’t know, and explain when they can expect to hear more

Tips for creating a compelling narrative – 2/2

Tip	What it means in practice
Be clear on what will be different...	Be specific – what will be different in your audience’s day-to-day lives? What will be different for customers?
...while acknowledging the strengths and achievements of the past	For example, talk about how our core values, like integrity, are not going to change; celebrate the core strengths we want to build on
Use tested rhetorical techniques if you can build them into your own style	For example, use repetition for emphasis: “I believe we can do this. I believe we have the skills to do this. I believe we need to do this”
Use language that is relevant to your audience	For example, translate terms such as productivity or patient-centred care into what group will actually experience and deliver
Show your personal commitment	Make it clear what you will do differently and what you will do to support your group during the change; what it means for you

Interview a colleague – and vice versa – to refine your change story

Questions to ask

What positive example of this change have you already seen (ideally in your own organization)?

Describe what happened as simply as possible: who did it, how, and what was the happy ending?

How has this anecdote inspired you or the organization or part of the organization to change?

Be ready to share an example (true, positive, minimalist, personally meaningful) that shows that the change can be achieved

Tips for answering questions effectively

Don't overwhelm people with data



Be clear on the steps



- And then we'll be there
- After that, D will happen
- Next, we'll need to do C
- Then, we'll do B...
- First, we'll do A...

Spell out specific benefits



Be very clear on what you expect from people and what they can expect from you



Being clear about what you expect from people during a transformation and what they can expect from you is crucial

Example – chemicals

I expect you to continue the great work on achieving savings, reducing inventory, and managing receivables

I expect you to stop talking about why we can't achieve our targets and start collaborating on the actions that will ensure we deliver

I expect you to start being more disciplined in your approach to your work. We have a lot to get through. Prioritize, delegate, and follow up

I will continue pushing hard to deliver the targets. I will reward those who achieve. And I will support you if you've taken a professional risk and it has failed. But I will act if you continually underdeliver

I will no longer work until I drop. This means I will stop micro-managing and trust you to deliver

I will start encouraging you to prioritize and delegate and will get you some more leadership training so we can really define your development needs and help improve your performance

Example – bank

My role in this transformation is to lead and drive the organization to where we all want it to be. It is the task of the heads of every business unit in the region to determine how they bring this agenda for change to life in their part of the organization. But, for all of us, from now on, there is only one agenda – **developing people and capabilities to get closer to our customers**

We must work together as an autonomous, highly focused team: no more silos, no more internal tug of war. Together we will build the future for our business, creating an organization of which we will all be proud.

Gather around one of the flipcharts and brainstorm possible responses to some typical questions that may arise when you share your change stories

Questions to ask

How are we actually going to do this?

What are the challenges, and what makes you think we will overcome them?

What are you asking of me? Do I have to work differently, behave differently, think differently?

Will I get support?

If you are asking us to change, what will *you* do as a leader?

Remind me – what will this change really achieve?

Taking storytelling to your groups

- **How will you apply what you've learned to your work in the following weeks?**
- **What are your next steps?**
- **Who will you tell?**
- **What barriers could get in the way?**
- **What are your key takeaways?**

Change story work is never really done



It makes sense to have multiple versions of the change story: a 30-second version, a 3-minute version, and a 30-minute version (30-3-30)

Duration of change story

When you might use this

30 seconds

- In a hallway conversation
 - During a Q&A session
 - To reframe the conversation during a meeting
 - To close a meeting
-

3 minutes

- To kick off a formal meeting
 - Over lunch with a colleague
 - On a video
-

30 minutes

- Plenary address/speech (e.g., at a kickoff meeting, townhall, or webinar)